

cc: Harold, Mark

September 8, 1984

Dear Jim,

I'm finally getting around to taking a close look at "What Could Castro Have Known," a.k.a CIA 1648-452-C, the 15-page memo of 24 April 1975. Things are rather hectic around here, so I'm not doing this as thoroughly or carefully as I probably should. I'm rather fuzzy on the facts of the CIA plots against Castro, and on the history of CIA communications with the Rockefeller Commission, so anything I say should probably be checked before anyone uses it.

This is a substantively and procedurally interesting document, but my impression is that it may be best (i.e., most effective for whatever legal uses you have in mind) to stay away from the substance (including the material which is still deleted) and just let the basic facts speak for themselves: all this stuff was deemed releasable in 1976, but not in 1984; therefore, any current CIA claim that another document is withholdable in full is suspect.

For our own amusement as much as for possible use in court, here is what I have been able to find about the origin and intended function of this document.

First, there seems to be some confusion in the CIA's position. According to paragraph 32 (on p. 27-9) of the Dube affidavit (part of the CIA's original motion for summary judgment), "apparently the paper was intended to be strictly a CIA internal paper." But page 108 of the Document Disposition Index (DDI) calls it an inter-agency document. Was this just a simple error? I see no purpose in any dissembling here, since it looks like inter- and intra-agency documents are covered equally by the exemptions.

I'm fairly confident that this memo was prepared in response to inquiries from the Rockefeller Commission. At this point, however, my guess is that it was not sent to the RC.

Before I get into the details, a parenthetical remark: this document reminds me that Phil Melanson's efforts to get the RC material at the Ford Library may (if successful) turn up something of current political significance. I haven't seen any mention recently of the fact that El Presidente was a member of the RC. Does anyone know what role he played in their work (if any)? As I recall, they said nothing about the CIA's plots against Castro (just passing the hot potato on to the Church Committee); the JFK chapter in the RC report certainly avoided these plots. Still, the plots were very much on the RC's collective mind. Did Reagan perchance think the CIA plots were okay? Did he (and I'm just speculating) perchance conclude that Castro had retaliated? Does that have anything to do with his current hostility towards Castro (or, for that matter, with the fact that the Justice Department has not yet gotten around to declaring the JFK case closed, as far as I know)?

CIA #1646-452A (#RC 5 in my file) is a rather interesting letter from David Belin (for the RC) to the CIA (2 pp., 15 April 1975). Belin asks a number of provocative questions relating to the CIA plots. We have the CIA's reply to at least one question (CIA #1644-451, a long memo whose author we have been told [not by the CIA] is Ray Rocca, deals [inter alia] with Castro's remarks of 7 Sep 63 to AP reporter Daniel Harker). We know that there was some discussion inside the CIA of how much of that memo should or would be made part of the RC's records. I don't think we have any written CIA response to other of Belin's questions, such as #5 (was LBJ told about the plots against Castro); maybe a response is withheld, and maybe Belin was just briefed orally and persuaded to lay off.

The question relevant to this discussion is #2. The question is narrowly framed, perhaps reflecting Belin's concern that he personally (as a member of the WC staff) had been the victim of a CIA coverup. He asked, "Did the CIA at any time prior to the completion of the Warren Commission investigation have any documents or other information indicating that Castro may have known about such [CIA assassination] plans?" If so, he wanted documents and details.

Let me toss out, just as a hypothesis, the suggestion that #452C represents part of a CIA response to that question - the part done by someone who knew (or had access to) detailed information about the CIA plots. The other part of the

CIA response, I am guessing, was made by someone who didn't know the details of the CIA plots. Perhaps only the latter account was sent to the RC; that would explain the CIA's claim (Dube affidavit, p. 28) that "The paper [#452C] did not lead to the Agency taking a position; in fact, the Agency decided it was not necessary to take a position on the matter involved."

We do have some details on what the CIA told the RC. In a memo of 22 April 1975 by Raymond Rocca of CIA Counterintelligence (#60 in my listing of the items released to Borosage [CNSS] in 1976), reference is made to each of the five questions in Belin's April 15 letter. Rocca wrote that he gave the gist of the replies to Belin in a conversation from 10:30 to 12:15 on 22 April 1975. This is, remember, two days before the date of #452C. On question 2, Rocca said only "We have no evidence in our materials indicating Castro's knowledge or the possession of documentation of alleged assassination plans directed against him." Rocca cautioned that his replies were based only on a review of the Oswald 201 file.

On May 30, 1975, E. H. Knoche sent Belin #1644-451, entitled "Review of selected items in the Lee Harvey Oswald file regarding allegations of Castro Cuban involvement in the John F. Kennedy assassination." I'm quite sure this memo (which is undated) was by Ray Rocca, although I'm not sure offhand how I would prove that.

I think I learned somewhere (Church or Schweiker Report? Perhaps someone could refresh my memory) that Rocca did not know about the plots against Castro - in 1964 at least, and perhaps even in 1975. There are some suggestions in the 1975 record that he was still ignorant of them (officially, at least). #451 was sent to the RC with a peculiar disclaimer by Knoche: "The attached review represents the research and analysis of an individual officer. It has not been fully researched and verified and does not necessarily represent the position of this Agency." I don't know what is in the substantial deleted sections, but there is one sentence which I don't think anyone who knew of the CIA plots would have the gall to write. After reviewing Castro's remarks to Harker, Rocca says that "Castro's warning and threat ... was an act of singular irresponsibility and under no circumstances was excusable as retorsion [sic] for what the Cuban emigres were doing during the summer of 1963." Similarly, Rocca's internal CIA memo of 22 April refers to "any alleged plan to assassinate" Castro; "As far as our materials show, there were no such plans underway or known to us in CI staff, as the working-level point of contact with the Warren Commission." My guess is that Knoche's disclaimer was in part because he knew how much Rocca didn't know.

At a similar level, there is reason to believe that the memo in question (#452C) was in part a response to Belin's inquiry. Belin stated (on the explicit assumption that there was a CIA plan to kill Castro) that "There is evidence that Castro, prior to November 22, 1963, knew about the existence of such plans and the possible involvement of the U.S. government." I think the unknown author of #452C was responding to this when he emphasized (at the beginning and end of his memo) that much of what was going around was speculation, specifically, speculation that Castro had learned of the plots against him.

When I first read #452C, I was struck by how unsophisticated it seemed, and how much it read like a rather mediocre college term paper. For example, if you are serious about dealing with the question of "What could Castro have known," you would certainly look at what he apparently did know - e.g., the Harker statement (which Rocca did indeed focus on). Let me suggest that the actual thrust of this CIA memo is much narrower: an attempt to establish that the CIA didn't screw things up by letting Castro find out about the CIA's role in the plots.

With this hypothesized purpose, the memo's coverage of the CIA-Mafia plots is basically window dressing. All I can really get from pages 2-7 is that there was a cover story, cover names, cutouts, etc. - the basic tradecraft to insulate the CIA itself from the plots. As the memo emphasizes, it is unlikely that the participants would talk, and while CIA involvement could be speculated about, nobody could know for sure. At one level, of course, what counts is not what Castro could establish beyond a reasonable doubt, but what he could or would infer. But, as I read this memo, the message is that the CIA did muddy the waters properly in those plots.

The section on the CIA-Mafia plots raises some interesting questions of detail, which I'll get back to. I think, however, that the guts of the memo is the discussion of the AMLASH plot. It presents one side of the controversy about the nature of the plot. As this memo tells it, "there were no arrangements involving assassination until November 1963," so Castro could not have known and retaliated. As this memo has it, AMLASH in 1962 talked of eliminating Castro, but when a CIA man used the word assassination, AMLASH found it objectionable. When he requested a rifle in 1963, Des Fitzgerald turned him down "with the admonition ... that the U.S. did not do such things." When the CIA "finally decided to give [him] equipment" for an assassination (the hypodermic pen), "its delivery was the very date upon which President Kennedy was killed."

As we know, the story is far from that simple. I haven't had time to go through the key sources, so I'll start by just listing them here: The Church Committee report on Foreign Assassination Plots; the IG report (4 HSCA 126 ff.); the Schweiker Report; "CIA Plots against Castro" (10 HSCA 147 ff.); the Powers book on Helms, and Scott, "Crime and Cover-up." (Also, maybe, the Blakey-Billings book). If someone can research this issue carefully, I would be interested in the results.

The Schweiker Report conceded that the CIA had made the Mafia plots unattributable by design; Castro "probably would not have been certain" that the CIA was behind them. (P. 68) "The AMLASH operation was clearly different. CIA case officers" identified as such, and in one case as a representative of RFK, were in contact with AMLASH. "Thus, if anyone learned of the operation, he would have known that the CIA was clearly responsible for it." Helms and the case officer rejected the characterization of the operation as an assassination plot. But Des Fitzgerald's executive officer and the chief of SAS CI did regard it as an assassination plot. And, really, you have to stretch things pretty far to argue that Castro would not have been justified in so regarding it.

The details are fuzzy in my mind, but there were serious questions about the security of the AMLASH operation even before 11/63 - people meeting with AMLASH against the advice of the relevant professionals, for example. Fitzgerald certainly should have been concerned about the possibility that he had blown the operation to Castro before 11/22/63.

Here is Blakey's summary (p. 151): "We considered the CIA disavowal of the assassination aspect of the AM/LASH operation to be, at best, disingenuous and, at worst, intentionally false." (Powers, p. 151 ff., is also relevant.)

I'm running out of steam, so just a few more specific points about CIA #452C. The reference to "Latin exaggeration" on p. 12 is nonsense, and racist nonsense to boot. The memo is right to suggest that "one could speculate that Castro would attribute it [exile plotting] to the U.S. Government and CIA regardless of how it came to him," the reason is not so much exaggeration, Latin or other, but the entire context of U.S. policy, from the Bay of Pigs through Mongoose.

Something that never seems to come up in official discussions of what Castro knew (or thought he knew) is what he said in April 1963 (on the second anniversary of Giron, I think): he charged that the U.S. had abandoned plans for a second invasion of Cuba in favor of a plot to assassinate Cuban leaders. That charge was no secret (NYT 4/21/63, p. 26), but it doesn't even show up in the Schweiker Report chronology (p. 100) - and it's certainly not in CIA #452C (unless the CIA is really getting carried away with its withholding).

By the way, the copy just received looks identical to what I got in 1976 from the Borosage release - same deletions, same hole punches, etc. I think the absence of the visible classification markings (Secret/Sensitive) in the earlier copy is probably an artifact of the copying process.

Several details about the plots struck me as unfamiliar (but I don't trust my memory). For example, did we know about the involvement of the exile leader's son-in-law? (Pp. 5 and 7) (We're pretty sure the leader is Tony Varona, aren't we?) What about the "subordinate of the Syndicate contact" (p. 7)? (Is that L.A.-based Syndicate member Rosselli?) Do the other details of these plots (including dates) match the other official accounts? Is any of the stuff on page 9 about post-11/22 contacts with Cubela new? What mid-1964 reference to Syndicate & exile plotting (p. 12)? P. 10, line 1 - part of "Cubela" visible? Best regards,

*Paul*